



magazine

FROM MY NOTEBOOKS

By

Kevin Dech

The Trains . . .

I hear them the same time every night. Or morning, if you prefer. It's all the same to me. And for some silly reason it's important to me. Or maybe it's not so silly. I don't know. It's just the way I feel. And I guess that's enough.

What I'm trying to say is that I hear the trains howling. Every night about the same time. Far away and lonely. Their voices seem to drone on forever in that same monotonous tone. No big thing I guess, but for some reason I feel attached to them. Those voices, those beautifully dreary voices. They sing their songs for me and I listen, longingly.

I sit out here on my roof, smoking cigarettes, feeling the roughness of the slate wear away at my jeans, the wind dancing with my hair, bombarding my face and chest, causing it to break out in a rash of gooseflesh, and I desperately wish I was aboard that train. Headed to its unknown destination, chorusing its songs of passion. Riding on its promise of escape. Riding high up on top, like Dean in EAST OF EDEN.

I stare out across that horizon trying to capture the moans of desperation with my eyes. I cannot. The distance will not permit it. I see only the tops of trees and rooftops. The distance teases me. It jabs at my jealousy. It knows my pains and enjoys them. It laughs as I strain my ears to hear those last fleeting melodies as the song nears its end and finally fades altogether.

The treetops whisper to one another at my foolishness.

I am alone, with the night. The night can be so cruel.

I light up a cigarette and drag long. The smoke feels thick and warm as it settles in my lungs and I pause a moment before exhaling. I think of old movies, the classics. Y'know, CASABLANCA, EAST OF EDEN, REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE, the good stuff. I feel heroic sitting here high on my roof, smoking cigarettes, feeling troubled and confused as the night goes by. It's something Jimmy would do.

I smile, inwardly laughing at my ability to become so dramatic, unabashedly noticing my poetic insights. I feel the night living. Breathing, pulsating. Living out its secretiveness in its allotted time.

I am alone with the night. And my thoughts. I am content.

The Music . . .

The music wasn't as loud down there. Oh, you could still hear it. Feel it actually. That beat echoing inside my head every night. Pounding right through the floor. Threatening to crash right through on top of me. Endlessly. Oh yeh, you could still hear it. But mercifully it wasn't as loud. I could regain at least a little bit of sanity down there, what little I had left I mean. There was always a little doubt back then. No, No . . . there was a lot of doubt.

Yeh, the laundry room was the only place to go. The only place to at least attempt to collect your thoughts. Sounds pretty stupid, huh? Hiding out in a laundry room. It wasn't. It was necessary. Very necessary.

Maybe it was the simplicity of it. The washer. The dryer. The two tires leaning against the plaster wall. The concrete floor. There was just nothing there that you had to pay attention to.

There was a party up there, in the apartment I mean, just about every night for four months. Every goddamn night. Sounds great right? Yeh, well I thought so too. At first. But when it's your apartment, your possessions, your responsibility . . . your privacy, it's a little different. Sounds hypocritical, yeh, I know. But it's true. I mean, did you ever try to get to sleep at two in the morning, with ten to fifteen people in your living room and music turned up as loud as it can go? Let me tell ya, it's no cure for insomnia. So I'd stay awake. Long enough to see an ashtray get dumped. A beer spilled. A record scratched. I'd stay awake long enough to enter my bedroom to find even more people. Looking through my notebooks. Reading things that until then were unread by anyone but myself.

It's funny. Now I can't enjoy myself at a party. Even after all this time, I always feel I'm intruding on someone's privacy. Invading their "space" you might say. Besides I've always felt lonely at parties.

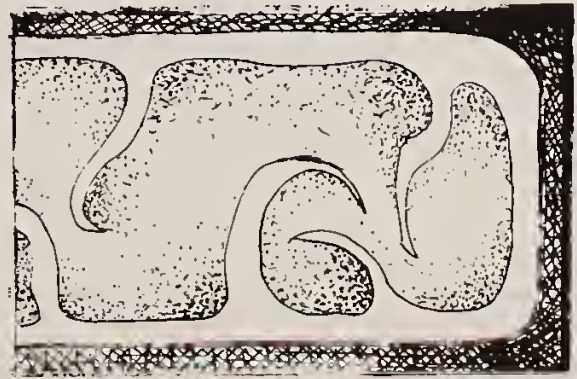
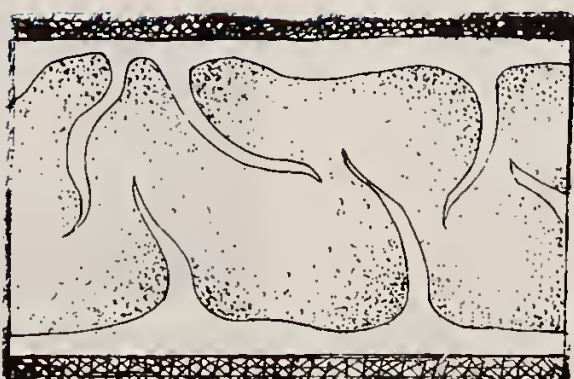
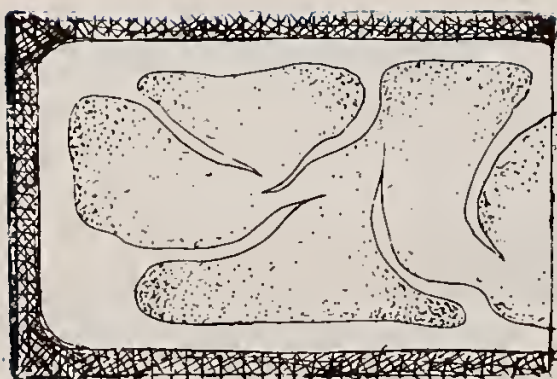
No. The apartment wasn't mine anymore. It was theirs.

So I'd leave, unnoticed usually. It's funny the way you become invisible in a crowd. I'd leave the music, the mess, the tension. Everything. And I'd go sit by myself on the washer or dryer in the laundry room.

The laundry room was located directly under our apartment. So, like I said, you could still hear the music. But it wasn't as bad. Sometimes even, I'd hear a break in the music. Ecstasy. I'd tilt my head back, and alone I'd stare at the ceiling. And pray it was over. I'd pray that momentarily I'd hear their footsteps slamming down the stairs and out the door like a herd of drunken buffalo. Into the street. Eager to return home, or to another party. Anywhere. Anywhere was fine with me. I was just so tired. So damn tired.

Then the music would return. Louder than ever. And I'd drop my head, blinking my eyes slowly. And stare at the floor.

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Gilda Normandin

Continued from Page 1

Neither of us was talkin'. We knew each other good enough not to have to, y'know? We just kept walkin' along the tracks, studying the ties as they passed underneath our boots. Both of us smoking Marlboros, the smoke trailing off behind us as if from two lumbering locomotives. Making a last run to some unknown destination.

The docks were in sight now.

I glanced around at the scenery. Of course most people wouldn't exactly call it scenery. The long stretch of factory buildings off to my right, serving as a spray-painter's canvas, pipes, trash. Really kinda dark and dreary. Gritty, if you know what I mean. A real eyesore. Me? I thought it was beautiful. It was home for chrissakes. Family. I loved it back there. We both did.

I stole a look at him from out of the corner of my eye. He was looking down. His eyes, barely visible from behind his long hair, looked tired. Tired. Angry. And hurt. A look I'd seen all too often. Dammit. I lifted my head a bit and watched as the side of the factory drifted by us, while the docks creeped up before us.

Dammit. He's bein' eaten alive. But from the inside out y'know? I could hear it in his voice when he talks. And I could see it in his eyes. That look. Like a wild thing that's been hurt and caged, and just keeps pacin' back and forth. Waitin'. Cuz there's nothin' else to do. And worst of all I could feel it. Because it's happenin' to me too. It's just that this was his night. I understood that.

We reached the docks, and with practiced ease, jumped up on them, casually swinging our bodies around to land on our butts.

We sat there silently. Dangling our legs off the edge of the platform with cigarettes dangling from our mouths. I dragged long on mine, then flicked it into the night where I could see the last of it being tossed around by the wind. Its head still glowing, showering its path with tiny sparks. His remained planted between his lips, lighting up his face a little, with an orange glow with each inhale.

We stayed like that for awhile. Him, puffing on his cigarette, exhaling clouds of smoke that crawled up into his face and hair, whipping away when the wind caught them. Me, seemingly finding great interest in the ground.

Finally, he finished his cigarette, and exhaled the last of his smoke, blowing smoke rings that were quickly snatched away by the wind. He ground out his cigarette into the platform and sat there silently. Apparently joining me in my studies of the ground.

I looked over at him again. The moonlight pointed out his facial features with a silvery glow. Furrowed brow. Deep, concentrated eyes, lips, pulled down at the corners in a constant frown. And the gash. Across the bridge of his nose. His father had a shitty temper.

"Hey." My voice sounded distant as it broke the silence.

He looked over at me through those tired eyes. I looked deep into them and saw all I had before. And more. He's seen too much dammit. He's seen just too goddam much. Y'see, it had built up again. Just like it always does. Just like it always will. Like a dam that builds itself higher and stronger as the water rises. Thing is, that dam can break too. It repairs itself pretty quick, and then starts building up again. Oh yeh. But it can break. You better believe it can break.

"How ya doin'?" I continued.

His eyes, locked on mine, pleaded for sympathy. And trust. And the dam began to give way a little as a tear rolled slowly down his cheek and onto the wooden platform, darkening a tiny spot as it spread into the grain. Many more followed, though his expression never changed from that tired, sullen look, and he turned his head away toward the factory buildings. In an embarrassed effort to stop the tears, maybe. But I don't think so. I think it was a kind of proud way to get me to do what I would've done anyway.

"Hey."

Slowly, he looked back at me. After seeing my outstretched arms, his eyes lightened for the first time that night as the dam broke completely. He offered me one last look, pleading trust.

"It's cool dude."

He collapsed into my arms and held me tightly, no longer feeling the need to hold back. And when my tears came, we welcomed them and held each other tighter still.

SOLO FLIGHT

Striving upward
So hard
I am only sinking down
down
plummeting into
the depths
The briny, nebulous
sea
of tears, secrets,
and confusion

At the bottom
I touch the sea-pearl
The iridescent jewel
of purpose and meaning
Radiating a thousand luminous colors. . .
Finally, set and centered,
The pearl of self

I rise, in contemplation,
I rise
Effortlessly rushing upward,
breaking the surface

New wings catch a swift wind
Out of the mesmerizing
waters
I ascend, stretching my wings,
Testing my wings
Bright, full of power,
they work into
a steady beat

I ride the wind
Free in my soul
I fly
I am pure flight
Pure power and strength
I soar
I glide
In utter joy

Judith K. St. Sauveur

FACING FATE

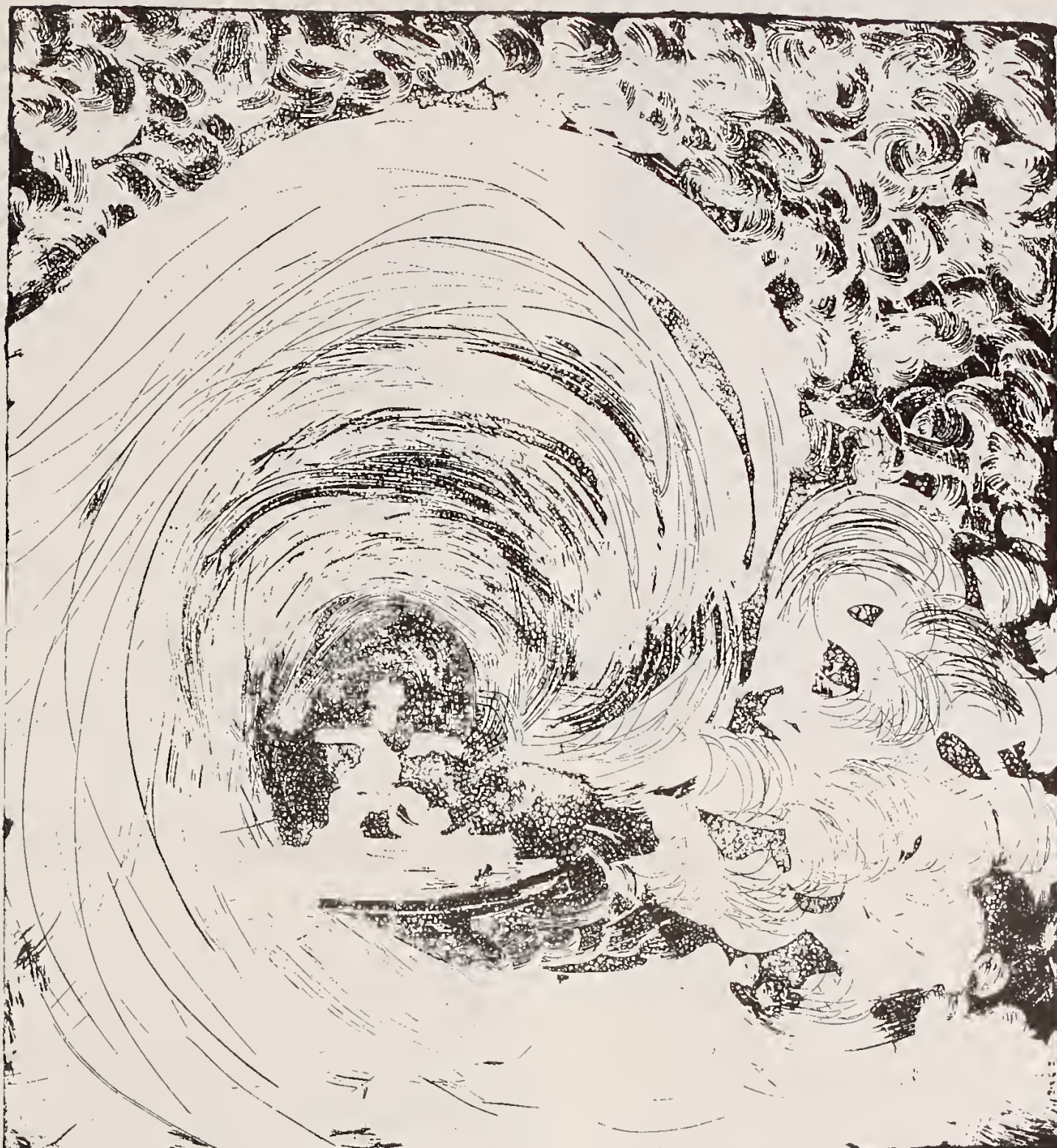
Accepting what appeared secure--
deception of a pleasant lure--
became the manacles that bound
a screaming soul who made no sound,
And then
the thundering of night
made futile any dreams of flight.

As if it was just meant to be
in guises of tranquility
descension slowly in the mire
sinking lower - feeling higher,
And then
the shivering of fate
like fingernails across a slate.

Karen Chiasson



Deborah Libuda



Deborah Libuda

Acceptance is Mine

By

Susan Buck

I could tell something was wrong immediately. My mother's normally cheery voice suddenly became dry with disbelief, and the smile instantly dropped from her pale face. In an instant, the day was shattered like a piece of delicate china crashing to a concrete floor. Unbelief gripped my mind; I was frozen in shock. I had heard the words but I couldn't accept them. My great-grandfather, the patriarch of our family, was dead.

Life is a succession of changes. People change, technology expands, years pass and none are identical. In the midst of all the changes, Grandpa was our stability. We began to think he was indestructible. We began to think he would always be with us. Suddenly he was not with us. The farmhouse which was old-fashioned and simple like the man who had lived there was now unnecessary, Grandpa was not coming home.

Too soon, everything he owned was being stripped from its place. They were no longer his personal possessions but objects for sale or to be discarded. I wasn't ready for this. Inside, a part of me screamed for it to stop. How could people reduce the accumulation of one man's lifetime into a chaotic, financially motivated sale? Family heirlooms went to the highest bidder. With every object that left, I felt an added loss.

Grandpa lived eighty-nine years and saw the world change in many radical ways. He saw the beginnings of the automobile and television and more effective communication. He lived through epidemics, wars, and the fury and destruction of a tornado. Yet, Grandpa remained seemingly unchanged. Despite the Depression, the death of three wives and a daughter, as well as three heart attacks, Grandpa kept going strong.

There was no warning. Grandpa changed so subtly. We had no idea that he would leave us so quickly. He took so much with him that I felt betrayed that there was no warning.

I can see now that I took for granted the insight this man could have given me

on things most people can only read about or see dramatized on television. It wasn't that I didn't have the opportunities to learn from him. He lived with us for many months, spent every holiday with us, and dropped in whenever he was out doing his errands. However, an old man's stories seemed to be too time consuming in my hectic days. Besides, I reasoned that Grandpa would be there with his stories when I was ready to listen. Perhaps my reluctance to tap into my Grandfather's wealth of information was my way of putting off the inevitable. It didn't work.

At his funeral, I counted the tiles on the ceiling to distract myself. But my emotions were overpowering and the tears began to flow. I missed the small, gray-haired man who was such a constant part of my life. Regrets flooded my mind and served as obstacles to acceptance. But at the same time, I felt privileged to feel such sharp pain because it could only come from deep roots of affection. Not all of his descendants had the opportunity or the desire to know how special he was.

It is now a year later. The rose from the top of his casket still adorns the wall next to his picture. The picture of the friendly, smiling, gray-haired man no longer stabs me with a sense of loss, but prompts warm memories.

I can remember him with more objectivity. In reality, Grandpa had been changing and it was the support system created by his family which perpetuated the illusion of his immortality. Any task or function which Grandpa became unable to manage was quietly undertaken by a willing family member. In reality, we had been growing stronger as he was growing weaker.

I only managed to acquire a few small objects from his estate. While these are dear to me, what has become more precious to me are those things I learned from him and the qualities I inherited from him. These are mine. They cannot be priced, discarded, or taken away. I am discovering within myself the same inner strength, optimism, firmness that borders on stubbornness, and an appreciation of quietness which were so much a part of him.

Have I learned to let him go? Yes—but only as I discover that in many ways he still remains.

THE GEM OF LIFE

By

David J. Dorval

I was five years old when my mother propped me up on the kitchen table and took a medal out of a package that came in the mail that day. Everyone in the family gathered around to see what it was. It was a silver medical identification necklace, with a caduceus on one side and the words "Congenital Heart Disease" on the other. We all gazed at it like it was a precious gem. It appeared as if we were all going to worship it.

"What do the words mean?" I asked.

"It means that you're special to us," my mother replied.

I didn't comprehend what my mother was implying. I knew, however, that I was different from everyone else. I would understand this only later in my life.

When I went to school, I would notice that my mother would talk to my teachers and I never asked why. I would come to find out later that she was telling them of my handicap.

My two sisters and five brothers were all good students, which put pressure on me. I thought that if I was special, I would have to do as well as or even better than they did.

When I finally made it to the fifth grade, I realized that there were some things I could get away with. One day I fell asleep in one of my classes, and the sister who was my teacher said softly as I woke, "Let him sleep, he must be tired." If I wanted to miss school, I would tell my mother I was sick, even though I wasn't. She would keep me home, no questions asked. Also, when I became a boy scout my scoutmaster tended to be lenient on me. At one winter jamboree, only I was allowed to continually ride in the sled, while other scouts pulled me around.

During that same time, someone told me my heart was in backwards. I still couldn't understand what was wrong, though when asked by cruel children why my lips were purple, I used that as my excuse. I was distressed when they would ask me if I had purple lipstick on, or when one of them told me I was a freak. I was puzzled by their comments and wondered if this "specialness" was not something to be proud of. I was always the last one picked to participate in a team sporting event, no matter how good I was. My friends did not treat me as an equal, only handicapped. I felt I had to earn respect from my peers to become an equal. I also had to overcome all of their insults and remarks. It seemed I would have to excel at something in order to be treated as an equal and gain that respect.

My mother told me that I could not participate in any contact sports. And I didn't even know what contact sports were. I began to see that my physical strength and endurance were much less than that of the other children. I could not play any sport that involved running. I was wondering what was happening to my "specialness" and where it was going.

The oldest of my brothers was getting involved in high school sports, and we would go and watch the games he played. We were all proud of him and his accomplishments. If he scored some points or if his team won, he would get a small reward from my family. After a while, all my brothers and sisters were involved in some form of sports. I was limited to sitting on the sidelines and watching. I was often jealous of them, but I was also proud of their accomplishments. Weightlifting was something I definitely could not do. I wondered if I could do anything that would put me above my rivals and help me find my "specialness" again.

It finally came to the point where the precious medal I had around my neck was getting heavier and heavier. If I didn't wear it, maybe my "specialness" would return. I finally laid the silver "gem" to rest in a junk-filled drawer.

After a few years, I was allowed to participate in some sports, as long as I didn't get too tired. The first freedom I ever felt was that of being told I had to learn and know my own limits. It was difficult at first because everyone in my family had their own ideas of what my limits were. Seven brothers and sisters meant seven different limits. My parents also had their own ideas.

My father was the one I had to impress the most because he would give credit where credit was due. He was always proud of anything any of my brothers and sisters would do, but I didn't know if I could make him proud of me.

As I attained puberty, I realized that my position in the family was diminishing. I tried to find a girlfriend to take home to meet everyone, but I was a "nobody" and to find someone would be as easy as threading telephone cable through the eye of a needle.

I learned I could play street hockey as long as I tended goal. I also learned to ten-pin bowl. My sporting life became more prominent when I was a sophomore in high school. I had won several trophies in my first few years of bowling, but I had never received the recognition my brothers and sisters did. That year my street hockey team won the city championship, (I was the goal tender) but my reward was an ice-cream cone. I became jealous of my brothers and sisters because it seemed that they had gotten the best years out of my father. I had forgotten about my specialness. It was nothing now.

Then my father bought me a new identification bracelet. It was a thin, flexible, silver bracelet with a red caduceus on its face. It had a compartment which opened up exposing a paper on which my condition was explained. It was small and light, like a woman's bracelet. I wore it a few times but the questions and comments made the bracelet as heavy as my necklace had been. Although I was in high school, I still had no idea exactly what was wrong with me.

In my senior year of high school, I finally found someone to love. She was the best thing that had happened to me. She loved me for what I was. Then, it was 1984. August 11 of that year was the worst day of my life. I had a seizure and I had to be sent to Boston to have a brain abscess removed. When it was happening, I thought I was dying. I found out later that this was a result of my heart condition. My heart had struck back at me. This was the first time we had to spend away from each other because I had to stay in the hospital for two months. I missed her dearly and I missed my family. Some nights I spent crying until my sheets were soaked. I wondered if I had entered the first stages of death.

My heart specialist came in one day and talked to me.

"Have you ever had any heart operations?" he asked.

"No. They told me I would have one only when I needed one," I replied with reluctance.

"I'll set up an appointment for you to see me," he said.

I started to worry. With missing my girlfriend and family, I was showing signs of psychological problems. It was in my best interests when the nurses suggested that the psychologist come and talk to me.

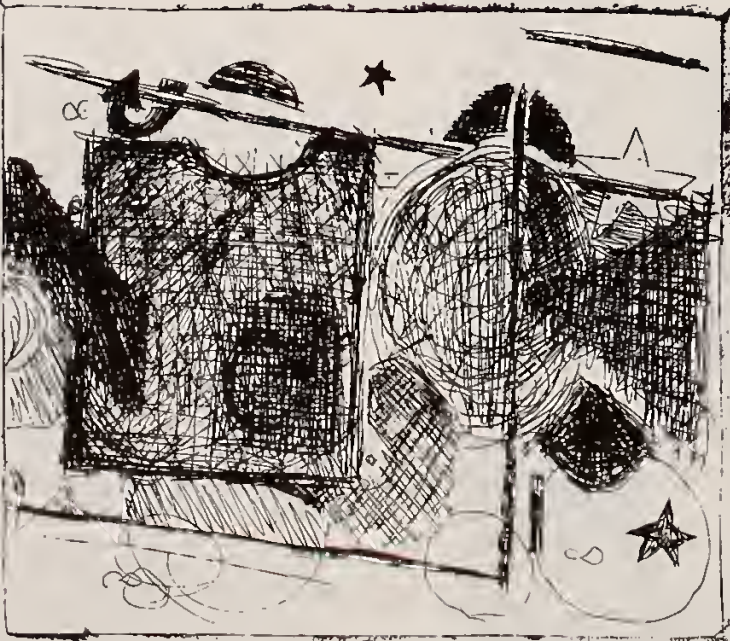
Between October of 1984 and May of 1985, I made many trips to Boston to talk with my specialist. It was during one of these visits that I finally came to understand what was wrong with me.

I had no septum in the bottom half of my heart and my pulmonary arteries were smaller than normal. Without the septum, the blood mixed and caused the purple discoloration of my lips and nails. The smaller arteries made my heart work twice as hard pumping my blood which caused me to tire out quickly. The only solution to my problem was to have major heart surgery.

It was going to be risky, even more risky than bypass surgery and more serious. In the last few months before I went in, I did anything I wanted to do. I wasn't sure if I would live through it or not.

I spent an evening with one of my brothers and cried so hard I felt I would never stop. I told him I didn't want to die. He comforted me until I fell asleep. I had shown him that I was scared, something I had never done before. He merely stated "You made it this far and you can make it all the way." He was leaving for boot camp the following morning and I was afraid we would meet next only in heaven. He replied, "Don't let me down or I'll kick your butt when I get up there." For the first time in my life, someone had confidence in me. I now felt I had to win for everyone.

I made it through and I'm coming along just fine. My doctor told me I can do whatever I want to now and I do. I have a new "gem" and a new "specialness" which is always going to be with me. I have only to look at my nine-inch scar.



Bill Thibodeau

ONLY TEMPORARY

By
Jonathan Haley

He finds his way there every morning, more for the promise of a paycheck, than by will. It had a pleasant smell, or so it seemed that first month he worked there.

He opens the doors before him, mechanically making his way to the steel pipes aligning the time clock. The faces in line before him remind him of his own.

His eyes wander passively over the men already working, their bodies, he notices, take the shape of their particular jobs. He wonders if these same men have ever thought as he thinks now. Did they, too, make the same promises to themselves as he has to himself--that this job be merely temporary? Were their minds ever vibrant or their eyes fired with desire? Or were they always as passive and sullen as their appearances spoke to him now?

As he continues his journey, he tries putting these thoughts of discontent from his mind. But, as he drags himself up the stairs, he is immediately aware of that all-too-familiar smell of oil that infests the second floor. And even the August sun intruding in the windows ahead of him cannot erase his desperate thoughts, for its once pleasant warmth has been lost to the extreme heat emanating from those tortuous machines, its comforting rays darkened by the ugly gray walls surrounding the room.

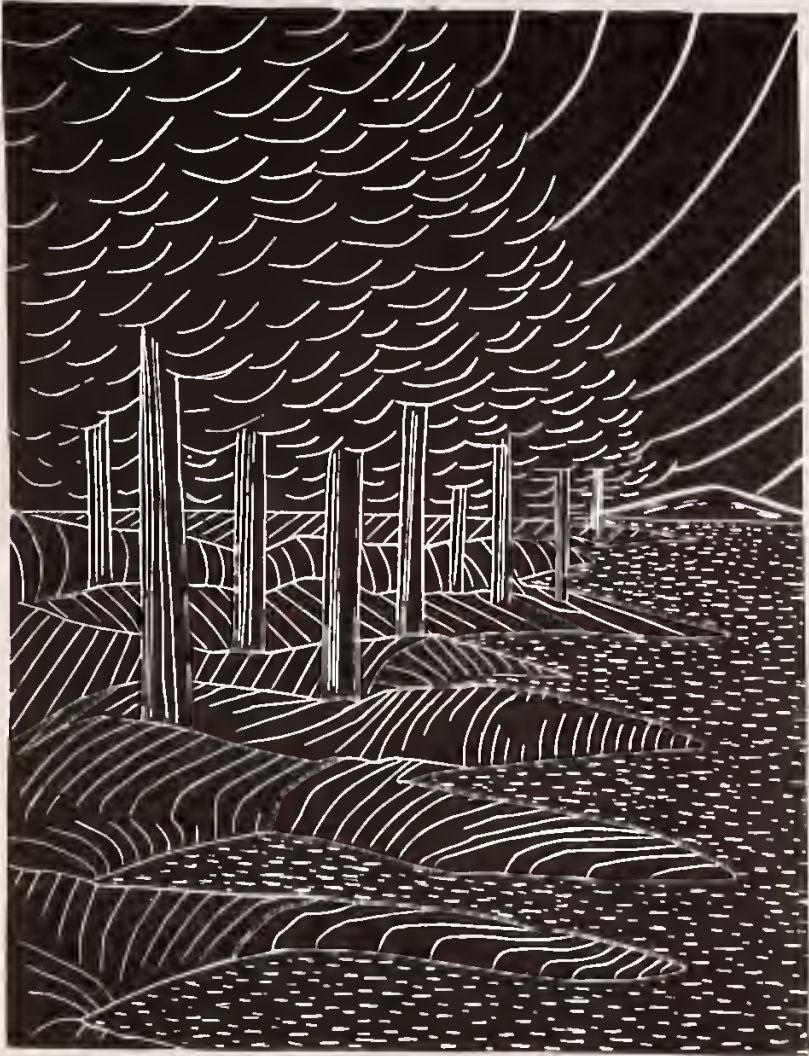
As his feet echo loudly across the steel-grated floor, he comes to his position in yet another line. Shuffling along, as do the others ahead of him, he approaches the designated one to receive his weekly rags nd daily, ten cent rubber gloves. How proud he appears, this chosen one, so loyal to those above, so lost in management's games.

Following further his destined path, he finds himself before the management "oasis." The cool air hits him as he steps upon the rug specially designed to catch the ever-present soil of the factory workers' boots. The counter separating his life from theirs acts as a barrer to protect this management from ever becoming too physically near the managed. No words are spoken. The foreman indiscriminately jots his employee number and the assigned machne number for the day on a slip of paper and sets it on the counter for him to pick up. He does so, silently, and once more begins his trek forward.

Upon finding his machine, he sits himself down. Although this machine is new to him, he needs no instruction. Management has conveniently worked everying out so that no thought is required to run any machine--just simply add one warm body to the bench and the work begins.

He glances casually about him and notices the unobstructed view of Joey, a statue-like figure fixed upon a stool next to his. Although he has seen Joey countless times before, he recalls now how he had never really heard him speak. Apparently, management heard little from Joey either, for his submission, it seemed, had earned him a permanent position in that same spot for the last 30 years assembling the same one-inch part. Shaking his glance from Joey, he gives his attention to his own place. He straps the harnesses of his machine on his hands that by cable are attached to his machine. Although designed for his protection, it literally ties him to this cast-iron contraption. He pushes the button that sets his machine into motion. One part after another he feeds into the metal monster, and those parts, like him, are forced into a useful shape for the company's benefit.

As the drudgery of the day begins, his mind in defense of his sanity fabricates a fantasy. But, his dreams take him only so far as the monotonous banging of the machine reminds him where he actually sits. A voice bellows at his shoulder "At this pace you'll never make your rate today!" He hesitates a moment, then decides to resume his position and begin his work again. But, as he eyes the passing foreman, he notices Joey at the next machine, untouched by the foreman's words, hunched diligently at his work. He recalls then the promises he made to himself two years before--this job would only be temporary. He stops his machine, unleashes the chains that bind him to it, and stands, wiping the filth from his hands with his week's worth of rags. As he stands there, out of order, he feels his sense of pride restored. All eyes are upon him as he steps to the door. Even Joey has lifted his arched back to observe the event. "Hey you," the foreman hollers in the silence of his machine, "it's not break, yet!" He turns to him, he smiles, and turns once more to the beckoning stairs ahead of him.



Denise Bissonette

BIRTHDAY

Knee-bending shards of pain that cut in two
An uncontrollable sea that ruptures the dam that
Protected it for these nine long months
A sea that signals the imminent arrival of one new soul
And the mystery that accompanies the moment of birth.

Three hours of migrating cramps that grab on
Hold for the count--three hours and a crown
"Push, now hold on and push again, dear!"
Sweat, ice chips, sweat and push once more
Is the pain necessary? Can't it just be born?

Twenty hours--and--convulsions
Summon the man with the knife
but the pain is gone now
only pressure and
movement and
nothing
where
am
I
am
just
floating
above myself
I see the tiny
new life but what
is all the fuss about
I am walking in the light
a strange but compulsive light
that moves in rhythmic waves that
beckon me away--I am higher now and
somewhere near the ceiling--the light
more pure and warm than any that I've
ever known--such a curious yet
soothing sensation--why are
they fussing so over me--I
am really just fine and
floating and seeing
myself--but wait
a voice tells me
Go back . . .
Go back--it
is just not
the right
time
I am suddenly aware of your wrinkled child face
You are so vulnerable--and I know--it's
not time
yet.

Carol Anne Brouillet

i magazine

i magazine is published by the Division of Humanities as a showcase for outstanding literary work by Mount Wachusett Community College students and alumni.

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BESIDE ME

us laughing
to me the
merriest sound.
Hearty choking sobs,
outrageous mirth seizing
breath--
doubling over
our ill-stitched sides.
No creature is safe
from the onslaught
of tireless ribaldry.
No phrase sings with life,
wit or charm
Unless you have spoken it.

I had a strange dream
of love,
of sacrifices rules
and duties.
And strife.
I awoke, aware
that another took its place
beside me--
All truth
in careless flaxen hair,
unstirring lids, long lashes resting,
mouth curved - even sleeping -
in a mocking,
sardonic grin.

Judith K. St Sauveur

COMPLACENT FINALE

Groping
for the jagged pieces
floundering
in my wreckage
unable to emerge--whole
and You turn
Your face
sneering in Your completeness

parasites
embedded
deeply
within
me
seep through open pores
emitting
an infectious aura
and You
step
back
fearing contamination

thin final
dredging of the soul
i am raked within the sludge
before the
cheering
audience
but now
at last
unrecognized
and You
You can only see
yourself

Karen Chiasson



Gilda Normandin



Deborah Libuda

In Three Quarter Time

by

Sharon Shinners

She must have worn an orange dress with a fringe then. Something like the flappers wore. Certainly not her wedding dress of choice. But it was the best she had. It was almost all she had, for she was poor by anyone’s standards. She is still embarrassed to think about the runs in her stockings on her wedding day. She was eighteen, although she looked three or four years younger. A babe in the woods, naive and inexperienced. Her auburn hair was simply cut Dutch boy style. But it enhanced her Irish green eyes and “peaches and cream” complexion. She had the sweetest smile this side of heaven. My father always said that.

He stood facing her, holding both her hands in his. He was older by ten years and much wiser to the ways of the world than she. He looked down at her and smiled. He said nothing, speaking only with his eyes. They said it all. Everything would be all right.

A man they didn’t know, a total stranger, came into the room. A Justice of the Peace. Within minutes they were husband and wife. No organist, no soloist, no flowers, no friends. They had run away to New York. Away from the people who said “He’s Protestant, she’s Catholic,” “He’s too old, she’s too young;” and hardest of all--“You’ll never make it. It will never last!”

I never really saw them as they were then--only in my mind. But I had heard the story many times over. It was Halloween, 1929--only days after the Stock Market crashed. Outside, panic and chaos ran rampant in the streets. In spite of it all, they took a chance. They went inside, took their marriage vows, and left the rest of the world behind.

He worked hard and provided well for his family. But they were never rich...at least not in material things. But two things they had in abundance--a love for each other and a love for music. All kinds of music. So naturally, growing up I was exposed to everything, from Beethoven to Blues. When I was in second grade, they bought a used piano--a solid oak upright. The kind you can put lots of family pictures on. And I was off to my first piano lesson. During the next ten years, playing the piano became as natural for me as breathing. They were always my best audience. It didn’t matter whether it was just a boring finger exercise, a Broadway show tune, or an elaborate ten-page sonata. It was their pleasure just to listen.

Content with whatever I chose to play, they rarely requested any song. But on each anniversary, and sometimes in between, they would ask me to play something special for them. A real oldie--“Let the Rest of the World Go By.” A simple song in three quarter time. He would lead her to the center of our tiny living room and they would waltz while I played. I was almost embarrassed to look at them. God--sometimes they would even sing! I would hurry through the song, anxious to get it over with. For I was still young, and sure my parents had to be the corniest people in the world.

Youth is great. You don’t have to ask questions, because you already have the answers. You hold the world by the tail, and really think it will always be that way. At least I did. But life has a way of jolting us just when we become very smug and pleased with ourselves. A way of showing us that perhaps our priorities could stand a little rearranging.

It was their anniversary again, and I had come home. I opened the back door. Aaahhh....the house smelled so familiar. But when they came into the kitchen to greet me, I was shaken to the core. Having been born late in life to them, I remember them best as middle-aged. But somehow even those years had slipped by. Today I saw them as others did. They were old. And I was on the outside looking in. Oh, his eyes were still as blue as sapphires, but his thick wavy hair was sparse and snow white. He was stooped and his step was slow. Her smile was still lovely, but time had caught up with her. Laugh lines had become deep wrinkles, and her vision had dimmed. I ached deep inside. When had this happened to them? Why hadn’t I seen it before now? Insidious...until it hit between the eyes.

I hugged them, unsure of what to say. Overwhelming emotions began colliding inside me. I was flooded with feelings of sadness, guilt, regret, and shame. If only I could turn back time. I would give more, take less. Listen instead of talk. And never, never take them for granted.

They followed me as I walked slowly to the living room. It was important to me to notice anew the old familiar things that made up their home. In 1970 I had embroidered a calendar for them. It still hung on the wall. She could never bring herself to take it down and put it away. I had always thought that was silly...but today it seemed very touching.

Somewhat in a daze, I sat down on the piano bench. A new picture of them proudly holding their first great grandchild had taken its place in front of all the other family pictures. Graduations, weddings, births...milestones in their years together. Rituals of life in rows across the top of our old piano.

I picked up the ragged music book and opened to page forty. It was habit. I could have played it with my eyes shut. Why had I never realized the significance of this song for them? Why had I been embarrassed to see the faraway look on their faces as they waltzed around the room, lost in a world of their own? They had asked for so little. And so, for the first time ever, I played their song because I wanted to, not because they asked me to. This time I played it slowly, with feeling...for them...and for me. Right from the heart--the way it should have been played all the other times before.

And I watched in wonder while he asked her to dance once again. A gentleman and his lady. It was not so easy to step lightly anymore. But I don’t think they even noticed the wrinkles, and tremors of his hands, or their inability to maneuver the steps that came so easily years ago. None of that mattered. What mattered was that they had shared life’s joys and heartaches for half a century. Soulmates, they had truly grown old together. From the first day of their marriage, they had learned how to escape the craziness of the world outside.

A bittersweet picture--this marvelous couple dancing to memories of years gone by.

My throat felt tight. I knew I couldn’t speak. Not yet. So, I just kept playing. . . .

UNCOMFORTABLY NUMB
(for Pink Floyd)

Horder of light,
What voiceless gestures
Would you have me perform?
Keeper of darkness?
What feats of strength?

And once again
Here, we in silence sit
Trying to evoke
That mythical creature of meaning
that is our soul
Trying, once again
To be what we mean
That is
The ever changing
In all the screaming realms of passion
That is our unruly soul

And once again. . .
Here, we in silence dance
In all the darkless
Overwhelming wonders
Of outreaching songs.

Tonya J. Roberts

HOMEBOYSHOMEGIRLSPALSandFRIENDS

some of us are in prison
some of us are dead
some of us are nowhere

often my thoughts turn back
to arlington street
turkanis
the square
prattville and even
crescent corner--places to hang. . .

I remember the fear and
the hate
because your sisters were digging
on my blackness

some of us were cool are cool

it's been 15 16 17 years
since we hung out on
those corners
getting high
fucking and
kicking ass
now our kids are there
hanging out
getting high
fucking
and kicking ass.

Hightower '86

DECEMBER 30

Christmas tree--
magical greenery, sparkling,
glittery and--onerous

now - dismantling yards
of garlands, tinsel, and
crayon colored lights are

dimmer now--errant needles
under carpets and cushions
always disturbing in

July--delicate decorations
that survive curious children--
now gently pack

away--only the
tinsel memories remain--
gilding the way to the end of the year

Carol Anne Brouillet



Regina Roy

IT REALLY DID
MEAN A LOT

By

Diane Soucy

I can't believe it's finally here, I thought, graduation day! I made it! No more 24-hour shifts, no more being the 'underdog,' no more boring classes, and best of all, no more of "the Weasel." Yes, I'm especially glad to be rid of him.

My schooling in X-Ray Technology had consisted of two grueling years of intensive on-the-job training. We graduates, the fifteen of us, had been through so much together. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; but, through it all, one thing was for sure: we were in it together. If it wasn't for them, I never would have made it.

Beads of perspiration dampened my forehead as the bright lights beamed down upon the stage, accentuating the brightness of the red carpeting and the unusual whiteness of our newly purchased uniforms. As the guest speaker bellowed his words of wisdom and praise into the podium's microphone, I glanced over to the row of chairs directly opposite the stage. There they sat, in all their glory, Radiology's "Elite."

Tall, lean, redheaded Miss O'Connel, Chief Technician, sat ever so prim and proper, lady that she was, on the chair furthest to the left. The years had faded the flame color of her hair significantly, but they hadn't dulled her stern determination a bit. She had seen to it that our uniforms were to "mid-knee," at the very least, and that we all behaved in a manner befitting young ladies. Luckily, our dealings with her were minimal; although, I suppose she meant well.

In stark contrast, short, stout, bespectacled Dr. G. F. Gibbons sat near her. He was Chief Radiologist, and we were known as Gibbon's Girls. If he told a joke, we all laughed, funny or not. If he was angry, we were subdued. He called the shots.

Dr. Merrill was next; tall, suave, handsome, but married. It was such a joy to look at him though. As appearances go, he was like a "fish out of water" in comparison to his colleagues.

Well, there he sat, furthest to the right, Dr. Siegel, whom I had nicknamed "the Weasel." Short, slim, and balding, he was a favorite among students. He was kind and gentle to others; but, truth of the matter was, to me he was sneaky, cunning, conniving. He would pounce upon me when I least expected it.

At first I thought it was my imagination, but as time went on, it became all too evident that, for some reason, the man just did not like me. Nothing that I did was right. Others would bring films to him of identical quality and get praise. All I ever got were things like: "This film contrast is poor." "The lateral positioning on this ankle is off." "You didn't get full inhalation on this chest x-ray. I would say that you had better shape up." Why, I was surprised that he never actually blamed me for the very fractures and pathology he found on those films! They all told me that I was being paranoid at first; but, doubtful as they were initially, even they eventually agreed.

"He's out to get you," they'd say.

"What in the world did you do to make him feel that way?" others would ask.

I asked myself the same question because it hurt to be singled out that way. He must have a reason, I thought. I'll have a talk with him to clear the air. This can't go on. I mustered up all my courage one day, and I timidly approached him.

WELCOME TO BASIC TRAINING

By

Ben Martino

Warily we stepped from the overcrowded, scruffy, olive-drab bus. We could almost feel the strictness in the air. Confidently we formed four ranks without a word being said. There he stood. Our First Sergeant. He was not as big as I had pictured him. He was only 5'7" maybe 5'8", his shoulders weren't exceptionally large, and I'll bet he didn't weigh much over 170 pounds. Certainly not the image placed in my mind by former trainees who lived through Boot Camp.

"Howdy, y'aall. I'm First Sergeant Roberts, and I'd like to welcoome y'aall to Companny A, Fooourth Battallion, 2nd Training Regiment, Fort Gordon, Georgeyya," he said with that sing-songy voice of a southern gentleman. Somehow the voice, the body, his whole presence, just didn't fit the concept of a Drill Sergeant.

"We ain't gonna do much today, gonna give you the day off to get settled in, but we'll start trainin' tomorrow. I wanna meet each and every one of ya, kinda say hi, and learn somethin' 'bout cha," he continued as he stepped in front of the first recruit in the first row.

"Mornin' Private Tomkins, where you all from soldier?"

"Alabama, Sergeant."

"Well, howdy there boy, glad to meecha! He replied, as he extended his right hand in friendship. Gee, this isn't going to be too bad, I thought, as the Sergeant stepped in front of the next man in line. Routinely, he recited the same greeting.

"Mornin', Private Kirby, where you all from soldier?"

"Jersey, Sergeant."

"Oh, Jersey, drop and give me twenty!" he snapped, with a cunning smirk on were greeted with the old, "Howdy boy, glad to meecha." But if you lived north of Jersey soldier filled my ears in the background.

"One, two, three At the same time, the Sergeant stepped in front of the next man. I was standing about twelve people down the line to the Sergeant's right, and I listened intently. Each time he stepped in front of a Southern Soldier, they were greeted with the old, "Howdy boy, glad ta meecha. " But if you lived north of the Mason-Dixon line, get ready to do some push-ups.

Being from Massachusetts, I knew as soon as I opened my mouth, I was in trouble. Bravely, I thought, why not have some fun with this guy. I'm going to have to do push-ups no matter what I say, so what the hell, I've got nothing to lose.

As I recaptured my composure, my eyes met his as he stepped in front of me.

"Mornin', Private Martino, where you all from soldier?"

With defiance I replied, "I'm from the Souuuth, Sergeant."

His eyes twinged as he said, "Ya, what part?"

"South Boston!" came my smirky reply.

"Drop and give me twenty," was his command. I dropped and counted off twenty push-ups, but as I was returning to the standing position, I suddenly felt an empty uneasiness in my stomach. First Sergeant Roberts was still standing in front of me. Instantly he barked, "Did ya like them twenty?"

"No, Sergeant," I squeaked. As the muscles in his face tightened, the turbulence in his voice quickly reassured me that I was definitely here at Comppany A, 4th Battalion, 2nd Training Regiment, and not back in Massachusetts.

"Then get down and give me twenty you do like," he growled. Again I dropped and counted out twenty push-ups, and again an uneasiness still stirred within me. As I pulled my throbbing body back to a standing position, the reality of my situation raced through my mind as intensively as the pain in my arms and shoulders rushed to my brain. In the back of my mind, I knew, he'd still be there, and he was.

His authoritative eyes were fixed on mine now. Somehow he looked taller than I had first thought. His shoulders seemed much broader now also, and his gentle Southern voice now appeared to be more like the growl of a bulldog than that of a man.

"Did ya like them twenty?"

"Yes, Sergeant," I replied confidently.

"Well, ya like 'em so much, get down and give me twenty more!" He said with a gleam in his eyes. Automatically my body fell to the push-up position, rhythmically my voice projected the numbers he wanted to hear.

"One, two, threee" As my lungs gasped for as much air as my mouth could give them, and I slowly attempted to stand on rubbery legs, our eyes met once more.

"Welcome to basic training, soldier; you ain't gonna make it," he said with a grin.

Continued from Page 7

"Uhm...Dr. Siegel, may I please have a word with you?" I nervously asked.

"What is it?" he curtly replied while continuing to examine the lumbo-sacral views in front of him without even bothering to give me the courtesy of a momentary glance.

Don't let his mannerisms put you off, I thought. With increased determination I proceeded. "I . . . I would just like to know if I have ever done anything to offend you. You seem to. . .to resent me for some reason."

"Why, I DO believe that you're feeling sorry for yourself, Miss Lajieu. I treat you no differently than I do anyone else," he coldly stated. Adding insult to injury, he rudely walked out of the room, leaving me with my bruised feelings and shattered pride. I was prepared for this meeting. I could have taken honesty-constructive criticism, critical remarks, even biased judgments-anything! Anything but that. A human being deserves better than to be ignored, dismissed, made to feel so . . . so damn insignificant! From that day on, I told myself that I no longer cared what he thought of me, or why.

A sharp elbow nudge snapped me back to the present moment, and Jean hoarsely whispered, "Wake up! They're handing out diplomas and your name's coming up."

The ceremony concluded with the beautiful lyrics of "No Man is an Island," and we all gathered, graduates, family, friends, and faculty, in the adjoining reception hall for refreshments and the exchange of congratulations. Mothers and fathers, proud and teary-eyed, embraced their daughters as boyfriends stood patiently by hoping that the festivities would end soon so that they could take their girls out to party. The radiologists went about shaking our hands and meeting our parents, exchanging personal little anecdotes with them. I introduced my folks to all of them, except for "the Weasel" of course. It had been a great graduation, and I was in a partying mood as I walked out of the hall arm-in-arm with my boyfriend, Tad. We were about to exit when an all-too-familiar voice cried out.

"Oh Miss Lajieu, Miss Lajieu!"

Oh no, not him! It had to be him. Everyone else pronounced my name the right way--LegYou. He knew it should be LegYou. Can't he even leave me alone on my graduation day? Tad tightened his hold on me and whispered in my ear. "Keep walkin! Don't slow down. You don't owe him a thing," as that voice called out again.

"Miss Lajieu, could I please see you for a moment?"

Tad's right! Pretend you don't hear him, I thought, while another calmer voice within me said, "The man is desperate to talk to you. The least you could do is hear him out." Against my better judgment, I instinctively turned to face him as Tad's warning echoed in my ear. "YOU'LL BE SORRY!"

I strutted across the large room getting angrier and angrier with each step. He probably wanted to throw me one last cheap shot. Well, this time I wasn't going to take it lying down. No, sir. I could feel my pulse quicken. The blood rushed to my angry face, and I certainly wasn't smiling as I snapped, "You called."

He seemed at a loss for words. He very uncharacteristically lowered his eyes, shuffled his feet, and clearing his voice several times he stammered, "It. . . it was a lovely graduation, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes," I skeptically replied. What was he up to?

"I didn't meet your family. Have they gone?"

If he thought I was going to chase them down to meet my "thorn in my side," he had another think coming. Why did he want to see them, anyhow? "They just left," I bluntly replied.

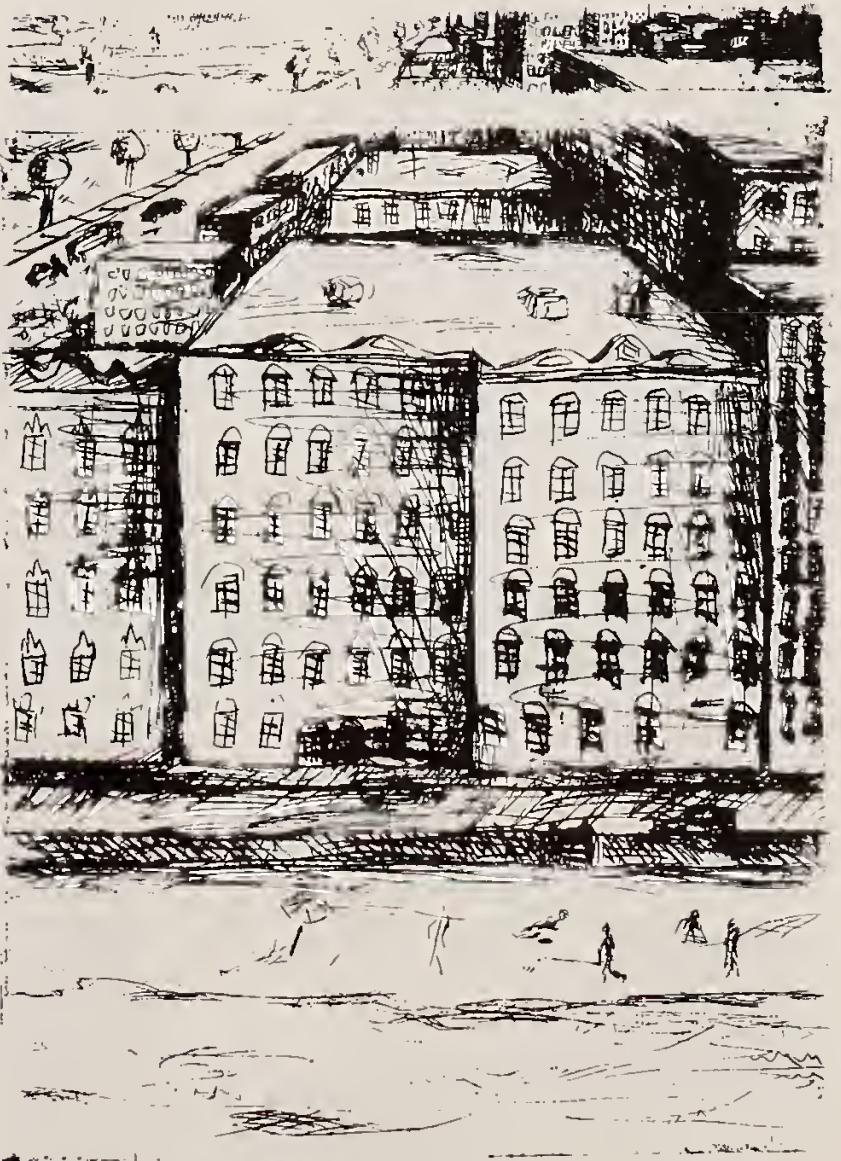
Silence. "This is it," I thought. "This is my chance to throw him a dig. God knows he's thrown enough at me."

"Actually," I proceeded with an icy smile and an even colder heart, "they feel as though they already know you. They've heard SO MUCH about you." The remark reeked of brutal sarcasm, and I was surprised at how deliberately cruel I had been. I had dreamed of this moment. He seemed embarrassed, defeated somehow. I had always imagined that I would feel such power, such satisfaction. Why did I feel so lousy? So guilty? So. . . cheap. I instantly knew that the remark had hurt me a lot more than it had him.

He almost turned away just then. He sighed in resignation and turned a bit; but he hesitated for a moment, and in a final surge of determination (and nervously rubbing his chin), he said, "I just wanted to tell you that I was proud of all you girls today. Each and every one of you. That's all I wanted to say."

"Each and every one of you! Each and every one of you!" Those words kept echoing in my ears; each echo slowly penetrating the message, little by little, that "each and every one of you" included me. "The Weasel" was proud of me! No! I couldn't have heard right. Yes, I know I did. No! Yes! Yes, yes, yes! The shock of this realization immobilized me; actually, you could have blown me over with a feather. This obvious change in demeanor fueled "the Weasel's" courage; he slowly extended his right hand as he looked at me to see if I would be willing to shake it. I hesitated at first, the wounds of the past two years were still so fresh, so deep; but, as I looked into his eyes, I no longer saw domination and threat. What I saw in those eyes was a contrite and vulnerable human being reaching out to me. My own hand trembled as it reached out to his. We stood there, hand in hand, without speaking for a moment. No futher words were necessary, the handshake said it all. When he broke the silent truce, he amazed me further by saying, "Thank you Miss. . . LEGYOU, is it?" taking great pains to pronounce my name correctly.

I left the graduation with Tad by my side, a diploma in my hand, and a song in my heart. "He's proud of me," the lyrics went--"the weasel," no, Dr. Siegel, is proud of me!"



Doug Morton